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The Doctrine

When taken to the hospital, the old herdsman was sick, blind, and dying. While he was there, his granddaughter came every day and read to him; the old man enjoyed the soft sound of the child's voice. One day she found, in the room, a Bible left by a friend. She casually opened to 1 John 1 and began to read. He listened attentively, and when he heard the words "And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," he interrupted her.

*The atonement is
the biblical doctrine
around which all
others revolve.*

"Tell me," he said, "is that really there?"

"Yes, Grandpa, it's there."

"Could you read it to me again?"

" 'And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' "

For a few seconds there was silence; then he asked, "Are you quite sure that's there, in that book?"

"Yes, Grandpa, quite sure."

"Please, take my hand and place my finger on that passage and read it to me again." As she did it, tears dripped down from his sightless eyes, and his voice was heard speaking with difficulty but with great assurance.

"My dear child . . . if anyone should ask you how I died, please tell them that I died . . . cleansed."

What this story shows is that the doctrine of atonement is not an abstract theory of salvation; it is, rather, the saving power of God in the lives of fallen, sinful beings.

What is atonement? In general, it could be said that the word *atonement* refers to the removal of any hindrance to fellowship with God. In a sense, atonement is the equivalent of reconciliation, but it also includes the idea of expiation, a fancy word that portrays the idea of removing any barrier that exists between God and us. The doctrine of atonement emphasizes the sacrifice of Christ as the exclusive expiatory means by which the barrier between us and God—which is sin—is removed, leaving us reconciled to Him.

of Atonement

The atonement, in fact, is the biblical doctrine around which all others revolve. It is centered in Christ's life, death, resurrection, ascension, mediation, and return. It presupposes the presence of sin, our fundamental and desperate need of salvation, and God's loving disposition to save us.

A proper understanding of the biblical doctrine of God is also indispensable for understanding the atonement. It was God's love that made it possible to restore us to union and fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ. We should never give the impression that the death of Christ was needed in order to persuade God to love us. God sent Christ to die for us because He *already* loved us. The biblical doctrine of atonement is grounded in God's love for sinful and rebellious creatures.

The fullness of the benefits of the atonement is enjoyed only by those who, after being touched by the Holy Spirit, accept God's offer of salvation in Christ as the exclusive means of forgiveness and reconciliation. Their hearts are possessed by love and gratitude to God and Christ for this infinite sacrifice.

Thus, it's our sincere hope that this quarter, as you study the meaning of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, you will be moved toward a greater commitment to the One who suffered so much for us, so that whether you live or die, you can, like the old herdsman, do so in peace.

Dr. Ángel M. Rodríguez, a native of Puerto Rico, is the director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference headquarters, Silver Spring, Maryland.

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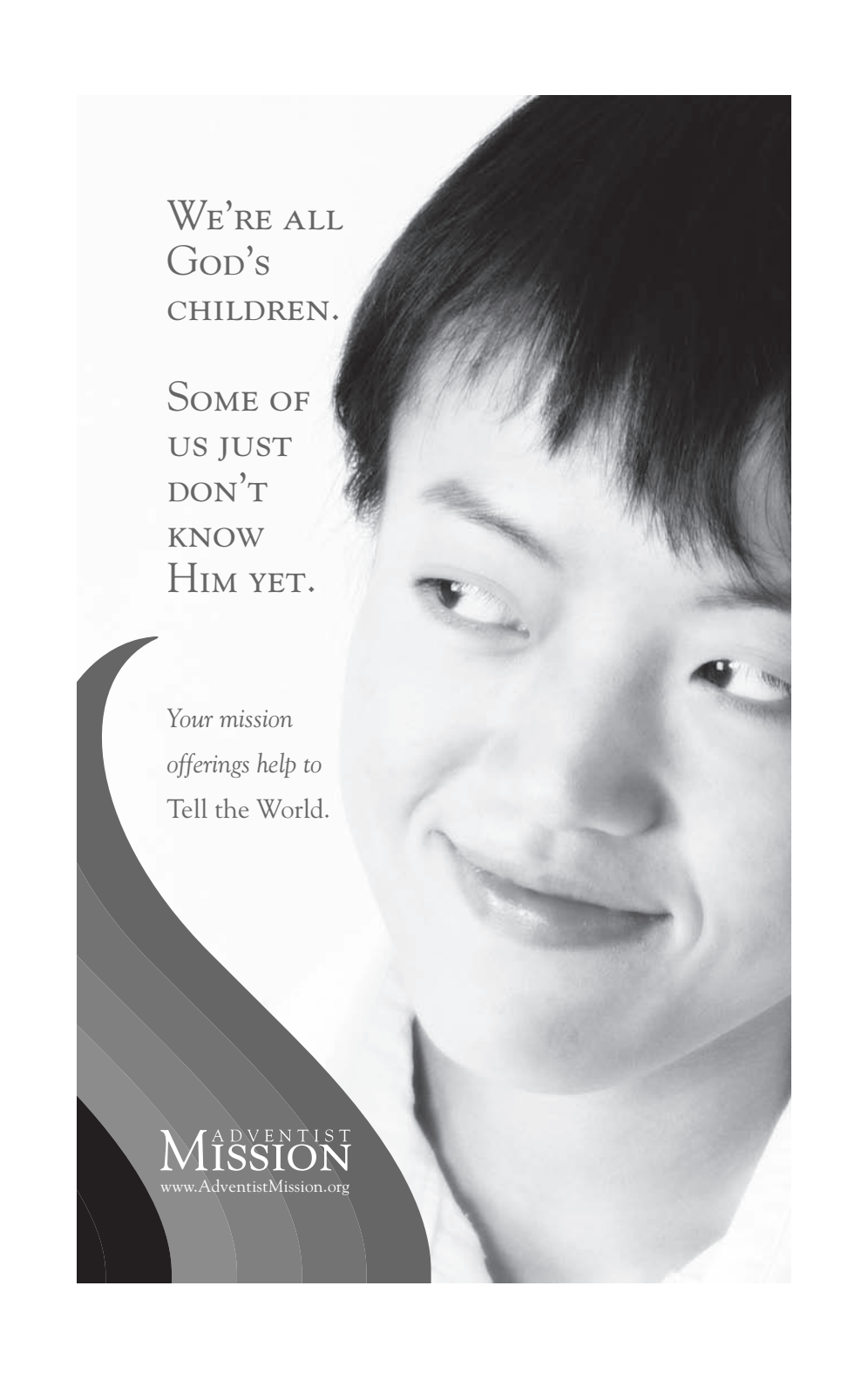
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